Eagle-Eye Tours

New Zealand Trip Report 2023

Link: New Zealand Trip Report 2023

November 4

Today was all about getting to Tutukaka to check in, have dinner and be prepared for the pelagic trip tomorrow. We did find time for a sneaky bit of birding which revealed some Californian Quails, Australian Magpies, Paradise Shelducks, loads of Swamp Harriers, Red-Breasted Dotterels, Bar-tailed Godwits, Variegated Oystercatchers and both Kelp and Silver Gulls. Not bad for a 3 hour drive and a 10 minute stop.

November 5:

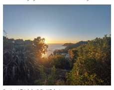
An early morning breakfast at a local Cafe to fill the bellies before an amazing pelagic trip out from Tutukaka. Clear skies and light winds met us as we left the Marina and then we were met with 75,000 birds over the day. 25,000 Fairy Prions, but the highlights were a Grey Noddy and a Campbell's Albatross. For those on the pelagic, the sky was clear, the winds mild and the team taking them out were enthusiastic. For those not going, we decided to investigate a few land based areas, revealing scaup, New Zealand Grebes, Australasian Grebes, Black Swans, Australasian Swamphens, Grey Gerygone and Tuis.

Getting on the pelagic vessel © Scott Roberts

Ngunguru Boardwalk © Scott Roberts

November 6:

A visit to the Ngunguru Boardwalk allowed us some good views of the New Zealand Fernbird and a lake in Whangarei provided great sightings of Australasian and New Zealand grebes, black swans with cygnets, Pacific Black Ducks, Scaup and Hardheads. Sadly, our evening at Trounson Kauri Park didn't reveal any kiwis, but we did find five Brush-tailed Possums.



Sunrise at Tutukaka © Scott Roberts

November 7:

Back to the east coast today, with more New Zealand dotterels, some south island oystercatchers, Pacific reef heron and yellow heads seen at Wenderholm Regional Park. That afternoon the Stitchbird teased us with short glimpses, but the New Zealand Pigeon was plentiful.

The team at Langs Beach

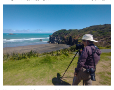
November 8:

Today was all about Tiritiri Matangi Island. Kokako, Stitchbirds, bellbirds, a Morepork and Brown Quails were good to see, but the North Island Saddleback and South Island Takahe eluded us.

Boat ride to Tiritiri © Scott Roberts

November 9:

A long drive day, stopping at the Muriwai Gannet Colony (sadly, the Lookout was closed due to cyclone damage to the trails), Kawakawa and Pukorokoro to see if we could find some waders, terns and gulls. Wrybills were the highlight, but we also found Ruddy Turnstones, Caspian Tern, a Lucistic South Island Oystercatchers and some Pacific Golden Plovers.



Muriwai Gannet Colony © Scott Roberts

November 10:

Pureora Forest Park, Whakamaru Dam and Huka Falls were our destinations today. New Zealand Falcon, Tomtit and New Zealand Kaka were the highlights from today, as well as a short stop to check out the geothermal substation near town. An amazing day of birding.

November 11:

Another gorgeous day on the South Island. A lovely walk to Lake Rotopounamu gave us good sightings of the Shining Bronze Cuckoo and the Long Tailed Koel, but the sighting of the day was about 20 minutes with a Kaka, watching it search for food within 5 metres of us, and when it found a nice hole in a tree, which was the obvious site of a wood border, we watched it bite away the wood to get to the juicy grub inside. Tongariro made us feel like we were at the gates of Mordor, from Lord of The Rings.

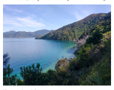
Lake Rotoaira © Scott Roberts

November 12:

We saw a few Double-banded Plovers at Manawatu Estuary on our way to Wellington, where we caught the ferry to Picton. Dusky dolphins, Salvin's Albatross and hundreds of fluttering shearwaters were just some of the birds we saw on the ferry to the South Island.

November 13:

Blumine Island, sitting in the Marlborough Sounds was amazing. New Zealand fur seals, Spotted and King Shags, Blue Penguins, Kelp Gulls and more fluttering shearwaters were seen on the way out and wekas on land. This was followed by a three hour trip to Kaikoura, where the snow capped mountains meet the sea.



Blumine © Scott Roberts

Spotted and King Shags © Scott Roberts

Weka © Scott Roberts

November 14:

Kaikoura pelagic was a highlight for a couple of guests, with really close view of a number of species, including the Short-tailed Shearwater, which was a new species for the group. We the had a couple of close Encounters with the South Island Robin and Pipipi at the base of Mount Fyffe, the Robin spending at least 5 minutes within a metre of the group. A late afternoon walk along the Kaikoura Peninsula was a beautiful to end our time here.

Our group at Kaikoura Peninsula © Scott Roberts

November 15:

A big day of driving today to get to get into and over the Southern Alps with a short stop at some river mouths in the way in search of the Black-fronted Tern. The Black-fronted Tern showed itself, as did the Kea, the Respoll and the Dunnock before ending at Lake Brunner with a Great Crested Grebe (Puteketeke), recently crowned New Zealand's bird of the century.

Looking for Black-fronted Terns © Scott Roberts

November 16:

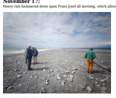
We finally got a really good view of the Tomtit on the Rakaitane Trail, near Lake Brunner and some Grey Teals before venturing back for breakfast at the hotel. The New Zealand Pipit showed its face, but the star of the day was the Okarito Kiwi.

Finally a good view of the Tomtit © Scott Roberts

Lake Brunner swingbridge © Scott Roberts

November 17:

Heavy rain hammered down upon Franz Josef all morning, which allowed most to read and edit their photos from the journey so far. We tried to find the Yellowhead at Haast Pass without luck, but we did get good sightings of the Black-fronted Terns, Rifleman, Crested Grebe and some Tomtits.



Okarito Beach © Scott Roberts

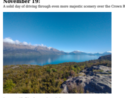
November 18:

We headed up to Twizel, Mount Cook and the Alpine Lakes to search for the Black Stilt and were not disappointed. The weather was as clear as crystal and the stilts were with some Double-banded Plovers, a Wrybill with chicks and a Pied Stilt in a valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains and braided rivers. Absolutely gorgeous.

View from Haast Pass Lookout © Scott Roberts

November 19:

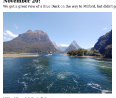
A solid day of driving through even more majestic scenery over the Crown Range and into Queenstown and up to Glenorchy where we were fortunate to find the two pairs of Baillon's Crake with chicks. After a delicious late lunch, we drove the three hours to The Anau.



Bennett's Bluff Lookout © Scott Roberts

November 20:

We got a great view of a Blue Duck on the way to Milford, but didn't get a Rock Wren or a Fiordland Penguin, which we were hoping for. The cruise and the magnificent scenery of the Fiordland National Park and Milford Sound was breathtaking.



Milford Sound © Scott Roberts

November 21:

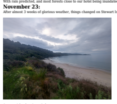
Stewart Island today. Island number 5. We thought The Anau was quiet. Stewart Island is a place to wind down and stroll around to different bays in search of our feathered friends. Out best sightings of birds, though, was at our accommodation, where Kaka and both parakeets visited regularly. The Kiwi Experience Tour was amazing. Both Blue and Fiordland Penguins, a few different shearwaters and albatross, but the dramatic part of the evening was when the Kiwi that we found, was startled by something, close to the group, and preceded to flip onto its back and start kicking the air as a defensive position. Amazing!

November 22:

With rain predicted, and most forests close to our hotel being inundated with Tui, making up about 90% of the birds seen yesterday afternoon, the group decided to book a pelagic trip today, heading out for three hours into the Southern Ocean. We had some great sightings of the Fiordland and Blue Penguins, Brown Skua, Salvin's and White-browed Albatross.

November 23:

After almost 3 weeks of glorious weather, things changed on Stewart Island. It didn't dampen our spirits as we bumped over the waves to Ulva Island in search of the elusive South Island Saddleback and Yellowhead. Sadly, the winds and rain kept the birds hidden, but we heard them. A bumpy ferry back to Bluff and off to our final destination - Dunedin - getting in at 9.00 pm for a well earned shower and rest.



Stewart Island © Scott Roberts

November 24:

After a rather cold, wet morning, we ventured out the Otago Peninsula to visit the Royal Albatross Colony and OPERA, the Penguin Centre. It was beautiful to end with the Blue Penguins in their nest boxes and seeing the Royal Albatross soaring overhead. Dinner involved the bird survey. Where each participant provided their vote for the top 5 species over the trip to find out the bird of the tour. The top 8 results for this tour are...........drum roll please........in order of points, highest first: 13 Kaka (5 votes) 13 Blue Duck (4 votes) 13 Kea (3 votes) 10 New Zealand Fantail 8 White Capped Albatross (3 votes) 8 Fairy Prion (2 votes) 6 Wrybill 6 Black Stilt

November 25:

Sadly, this brings a close to the tour. It's been an interesting ride, with weather being absolutely amazing until the final 3 days, but we got to see almost everything that one would hope to see. 131 species of birds and 13 mammals over 22 days. The six participants, the driver and guide are now on their way to plan their next adventure, having met so many inspiring people.